



Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living

Breaking Open the Word
Mary Birmingham

3rd Sunday of Lent | Year A



Jesus and the Samaritan woman. A miniature from the 12th-century Jruchi Gospels II MSS.



Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Opening Prayer

Option 1: Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2: Use the prayer provided just below

Prayer in Preparation for Baptism and in Preparation for Renewing Baptismal Promises

Almighty God, who rules all things,
we hasten with eager steps to the venerable font of eternal salvation,
and ask you, Magnificent God,
that you command this font which has been sealed
may be reopened with the keys of your mercy,
and impart to those that thirst a most sweet cup of water.
May the voice of your divinity sound upon these waters,
may the Spirit of your sanctification dwell therein
and bring healing to all ills.
May the abundant streams of paradise flow from it,
that by your goodness heavenly graces
may be bestowed upon these new-born children.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

*Liber Ordium. Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica, edd. Cabrol
and Leclercq, Vol. 5, ed. Dom M. Ferotin, Paris, 1904.*

Catholic
**Faith, Life
& Creed**
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Word worksheets
connect with *Catholic
Faith, Life, & Creed*
Doctrinal Sessions.

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Sharing Faith

Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today is the Third Sunday of Lent. If this is the session you are using you are celebrating penitential celebration for the unbaptized people (elect) who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil. It is called a scrutiny. There are three scrutinies celebrated on the Third, Fourth and Fifth Sundays of Lent. Scrutinies are for the unbaptized what the sacrament of reconciliation is for the faithful. Scrutinies ask the Holy Spirit to deliver the elect from the power and effects of evil. Scrutinies are healing rituals that seek to uncover what is still sinful and in need of God's forgiveness, healing and reconciliation so the light of Christ can more fully shine in the heart of the elect. Today we celebrate the first scrutiny.
- ▶ The Church presents the elect with the Creed during the third week of Lent. The elect are to memorize the creed and then profess it publically before their baptism. The Lord's Prayer is presented in the Fifth week of Lent. The Creed and the Lord's Prayer have always been understood to represent the Church's faith and its prayer.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group. (@Five to seven minutes)

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

First reading: Exodus 17, 3-7

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings simply make a statement about the reading such as:

- ▶ The people of Israel were wandering in the desert.
- ▶ Moses was told to strike the rock and water would spring forth. He did as instructed and indeed water came forth.

If time allows, catechist continues with these points:

- ▶ Water was a sign of God's action, God's presence and God's care for his people.
- ▶ Water was a sign of life. Without water life ceased to exist. Water was necessary for life. Too much water caused destruction.
- ▶ Water was a sign of God's purification and cleansing.
- ▶ The people sinned and God sent rain for forty days and forty nights causing a cataclysmic flood.
- ▶ Water is a sign of salvation.

- ▶ Water was controlled so the Israelites could pass through at the Red Sea.
- ▶ Water sprang forth in the midst of the desert so the people would not thirst.
- ▶ Water then is a sign of the absolute omnipotence of God.
- ▶ The water of baptism both cleanses and saves. The first reading illustrates both themes.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to one or more of the following questions in groups of two, and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News for us today in this reading?
- ▶ What does this story teach us about God's relationship with us?
- ▶ Imagine the most thirsty you have ever been in your life. Now imagine that thirst as thirst for God. If God invites us to thirst for him, what does our thirst in life teach us about the thirst we should have for God?
- ▶ Describe your own thirst for God? What does such thirst compel you to do?

Second Reading: Romans 5: 1-2. 5-8

- ▶ Paul insists that there are implications to our justification through the redeeming death of Christ.
- ▶ Those implications are that the Holy Spirit fills us with God's love.
- ▶ We are gifted with God's peace as a result.
- ▶ Justification is synonymous with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.
- ▶ We are justified through the Paschal Mystery of Christ and as such we are given God's grace.
- ▶ There are roots of our belief in the Holy Trinity in this letter to the Romans.



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two and then surface brief insights in the wider group. If time allows, catechist shares from his or her own life experience.

- ▶ What is the Good News in this reading?
- ▶ In what way, if any, can you relate to this teaching?
- ▶ What evidence is there in your life that the Holy Spirit dwells within you?

Gospel: John 4: 5-42

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

Gospel Exegesis

(Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ What does this Gospel mean to you?

Catechist continues with these points:

- ▶ This amazing story has its roots in the history of Israel.
- ▶ Israel was divided into two: Judah in the south and Israel in the north. Samaritans were Jews from the north, Israel. When foreigners invaded the northern territory, they exiled the leaders, artisans, rabbis, poets, and teachers: the educated class.
- ▶ The peasants remained behind; they were the Samaritans of Jesus' day. They believed the Messiah would come to Mount Gerazim in the north and Jews believed the Messiah would come to Jerusalem.
- ▶ The Samaritans, in order to get along with their conquerors, adopted the customs and the beliefs of their invaders. They remained true to Judaism, but they also dabbled in the idols of their conquerors. There were five idols [Baals] that were introduced to their culture.
- ▶ Thus, such dabbling rendered them unclean and despicable in the eyes of the Jews. Jews, from the south, remained true to Judaism. Both groups hated and distrusted one another.
- ▶ When Jesus encountered the Samaritan woman and subsequently challenged that she had "five husbands" (an occurrence that would not even have taken place in a pagan culture of the day), he was in truth challenging her flirtatious affair with the five gods of the invaders. He was challenging all of Samaria to turn away from their idols and return to the God of Israel.
- ▶ Jesus, at this very significant well in Israel's history (Jacob was married to Rachel at that well) wed himself with the sinful, rebellious people of Israel. He welcomed them home.
- ▶ He reached out to a ritually unclean woman (Samaria), which in turn rendered Jesus unclean, and reconciled two peoples.
- ▶ He insisted that God was doing something brand new. They would worship not on Mount Gerazim or in Jerusalem, but all would worship God in their hearts, a new worship in Spirit and in Truth.
- ▶ Jesus invites the sinful woman, Samaria, to return to the God of Israel, to turn from the idols and turn toward God. Jesus, the new Bridegroom in the light of day for all to see wed and reconciled the people of Samaria and in so doing challenged the two groups to put enmity aside and be reconciled with God and with one another.
- ▶ The woman could do not less than tell everyone she knew. She was the first evangelist!



Mystagogy

reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to ONE or MORE appropriate questions (as time allows) in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface their insights in the wider group. Catechist responds by sharing his or her own experience. See appendix for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the Good News in the Gospel?
- ▶ Why is this a good reflection for our Lenten journey
- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ What is Jesus' message to the woman?
- ▶ In what way is his message to her a message to you?
- ▶ You hardly have five husbands---how can this be a message for you?
- ▶ What are the idols in your life?
- ▶ What would it take to turn from the idols in your life at Jesus' request?

Catechist invites participants to reflect on the following question in the group or in their journal. (@ Three minutes)

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?

Concluding Prayer

Prayer to the Incarnate Word by St Alphonsus Liguori (adapted)

The Beloved of the Eternal Father,
The Blessed of the Lord,
The Author of Life,
The King of Glory,
The Savior of the World,
The Expected of Nations,
The Desire of the Eternal Hills,
The Bread of Heaven,
The Mediator between God and Man,
The Master of Virtues,
The Lamb without Spot,
The Man of Sorrows,
The Eternal Priest,
The Victim of Love,
The Home of Sinners,
The Fountain of Graces,
The Good Shepherd,
And Lover of Souls,
Have mercy on us sinners
And strengthen us to resist all temptation.
We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

OR

Minor rite: Blessing: 95-97.

Appendix

Reflection on Reading #1

When I went to Israel we spent an afternoon in the hot sun walking from the Kidron Valley to Golgotha. We were told to bring water. I did not realize that we were in the desert and I only brought a small bottle. I ran out early in the journey. It is the most thirsty I have ever been in my life. We were called upon to remember Christ's sacrifice as we walked. I felt his thirst, and the thirst he had for his Father and for the people he came to save. The thirst was so intense I would have done anything to have a droplet of water. If my thirst for God were but a fraction of the thirst I experienced that day, I would let nothing, nothing, ever get in the way of my pursuit of God. I could think of nothing but the thirst I was experiencing. The harder I tried to contemplate on the passion of Christ, the thirstier I became. True thirst blocks out thoughts of anything but the thirst. It taught me a powerful lesson about what it means to have thirst for God. True thirst for God means that I focus on nothing but God. I realize that life does not allow for that. However, if God is a part of me, then I carry that thirst with me. My job is to tune in to the God that dwells within and realize that I need do nothing more than look within to have my thirst satisfied.

Reflection on Reading #2

I know the Holy Spirit dwells within me because now and then I become aware of the Spirit praying within me. In one of Paul's letter to the Romans he says that the Spirit groans within us-- the Spirit prays to God for us because we do not know what to pray for ourselves. I become aware of that constant prayer going on within me. When I become conscious to it, I pray in tandem with the Spirit. It is a consolation for me to know that the Spirit constantly prays in and through me regardless of whether I am aware of it or not.

Reflection on the Gospel

When I ask myself what my idols are, I must look at the material things in my life. When the clothes fall out of my very full closet I do not say, "Perhaps I should not have so many clothes." No. I say instead, "I need a bigger closet, which means a bigger house." It is very difficult not to be lured by the beautiful things that beckon us to purchase them. When I look at the gorgeous, beach-front homes around me, I find myself teasingly musing, "I could sure love Jesus in that house!" Then I am called to remember the poor people in Haiti who just lost life, limb, sustenance and hope for a new future in the earthquake. They would be happy with my tool shed in the backyard. Jesus challenged the woman to cast aside her idols and turn to the living God. Only in God will our thirst be satisfied. I am called to not be distracted by the idols of my own making.



Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

Third Sunday of Lent

Exodus 17:3-7 | Romans 5:1-2, 5-8 | John 4:5-42 *or* 4:5-15, 19b-26, 39a, 40-42

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from the celebration of the liturgy:

- ▶ Sacrament of Baptism
- ▶ Creed
- ▶ Sin and Grace
- ▶ Catholic Social Teaching
- ▶ Morality
- ▶ Moral Decision Making
- ▶ Evangelization
- ▶ Sacrament of Reconciliation

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the scope and sequence chart and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

BAPTISM

In the first reading today Moses struck the rock and water flowed from the rock. In the Gospel Jesus gave the woman living water. These were primary Scriptures used to prepare ancient candidates for baptism. Through baptism we are immersed in life giving waters. We are born again through the embryonic waters of baptism. It is thus most appropriate that that we focus our doctrinal session on the sacrament of BAPTISM.

CREED

The third week of Lent the elect are presented with the Creed they will profess for the first time at the Easter Vigil. The focus of Lent is primarily baptismal. Those who will be baptized at the Easter Vigil prepare to make a profession of baptismal faith. The faithful prepare to renew that profession at Easter. It is thus appropriate that the doctrinal session for catechumens (not the elect: formal catechesis ended for them at the rite of election) focus on what we profess in the Nicene CREED.

SIN AND GRACE

Today's first reading in which water flows from the rock is a reminder of the Israelites' wandering in the desert, their lack of trust and dependence on God, and their sinfulness. The story of the woman at the well reminds us of the idols and the sin that distract us from our relationship with God. It is thus most appropriate that we focus our doctrinal session on SIN AND GRACE.

CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING

The woman of Samaria was a woman, and a Samaritan. Both designations rendered her an outcast. Jesus reached out to her and by drinking from her bucket embraced her status. By touching her it rendered him unclean and required that he undergo ritual cleansing. Jesus crashed through the barriers of exclusivity and restored people to full membership and dignity in the community. Catholic Social Teaching upholds the dignity of every human person and exposes those barriers of exclusivity. It is thus fitting that today's session focuses on CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING.

MORALITY

The first reading echoes the unfaithfulness of Israel and the story of the Samaritan Woman not only exposes the idol worship of the people of Samaria, but also the moral choices a person makes in his or her life. Jesus invited the people of Samaria to come home. Coming home requires conversion and the commitment to live the moral life. It is thus important that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about morality.

MORAL DECISION MAKING

The first reading echoes the unfaithfulness of Israel and the story of the Samaritan Woman not only exposes the idol worship of the people of Samaria, but also the moral choices a person makes in his or her life. Jesus invited the people of Samaria to come home. Coming home requires conversion and the commitment to live the moral life. It is thus important that we focus our attention on what the Church teaches about morality. How then do we know what is moral? How do we know how to make moral decisions? Today's doctrinal session will focus on MORAL DECISION MAKING.

EVANGELIZATION

The woman of Samaria is said to be the first evangelist. She went out and told everyone what Jesus had done. She is an example for all of us. We are all called to go out and share the Good News of the great deeds of the Lord. She invites us on this Third Sunday to focus our attention on what the Church teaches about EVANGELIZATION.

SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

The liturgies of Lent are an invitation to deep, interior conversion. The Church continues Jesus' saving reconciling mission through the sacraments. The remedy for humanity's sin today can be found in the sacrament of Eucharist which re-presents God's saving mission on the cross, and the sacrament of reconciliation. The sacrament of reconciliation is a celebration of God's incredible mercy extended to sinners. It is thus fitting that today our doctrinal session will focus on the sacrament of RECONCILIATION.